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Humanitarian Assistance Following the South Asia Earthquake

**Before the Committee on International Relations,
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today about the U.S. response to the recent earthquake in South Asia. As we speak, an intensive humanitarian response is underway, with the full collaboration of staff from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of State, the U.S. military, the Governments of Pakistan and India, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

The crisis we are witnessing today began with a magnitude 7.6 earthquake that struck Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan on October 8 at 8:50 a.m. local time. The epicenter of the earthquake was near Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistani-administered Kashmir, approximately 60 miles north-northeast of Pakistan's national capital, Islamabad. Strong aftershocks continue in the affected areas to this day. The official death toll stands at 40,000 in Pakistan and 1,300 in India, and these numbers may increase as relief and recovery operations continue to access remote areas. Tens of thousands more have been injured, and millions have been left homeless by this disaster.

USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance, which I head, has the lead responsibility in the U.S. Government for addressing humanitarian concerns. We are responding vigorously to this emergency on behalf of the American people.

The U.S. Government has pledged up to \$50 million in response to this disaster. This represents one of the largest responses to an international natural disaster this decade. As of today, USAID has committed over \$15 million to Pakistan, with more in process. USAID has also provided \$100,000 in emergency support to India, although the Government of India has not formally requested international assistance.

USAID has deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to Pakistan to assess needs, report on conditions, liaise with local authorities, and coordinate U.S. Government civilian and military assistance. The DART is composed of a team leader, deputy, and additional staff focusing on logistics, military liaison, relief programming, and technical sectors. To support the DART and the U.S. response effort, USAID has activated a 24-hour operations center in Washington staffed by a Response Management Team.

A key element of the U.S. response to the Indian Ocean tsunami was the excellent work of the U.S. military in providing logistical support to the relief community. Once again, the U.S. military has provided invaluable assistance in this disaster. Military aircraft have flown dozens of sorties to deliver supplies and evacuate injured persons. USAID staff has worked closely with U.S. military officials to coordinate their humanitarian contributions. Relations between U.S. Government civilian and military authorities have been very smooth, both in Washington and in the field.

To facilitate close coordination with the Department of Defense, USAID has co-located the DART team headquarters with the U.S. military's humanitarian response team in Islamabad, and a military liaison officer has been assigned to the USAID Response Management Team in Washington.

We are also working very closely with Government of Pakistan civilian and military authorities, respecting their overall leadership roles in this response. They have provided vital assessment information to our staff, and we in turn have offered our disaster management advice and expertise. This will likely continue for some time. Pakistani authorities have repeatedly expressed their gratitude to our DART leader for the contributions of the U.S. Government.

In the initial phase of this disaster, there has been a tremendous need for emergency relief supplies. USAID has been working around the clock to meet this need. Hours after the earthquake occurred, USAID provided an initial \$100,000 for local purchase of relief supplies, and began organizing additional shipments of commodities from our strategic stockpile in Dubai.

To date, we have organized six airlifts which have delivered 1,150 rolls of plastic sheeting, 1,570 tents, 15,000 blankets, 10,000 ten-liter water containers, eight water bladders, 20 concrete saws, and two mobile water purification units. We have also airlifted ten World Health Organization emergency health kits to the region. Each of the health kits contains enough supplies to treat 10,000 people for three months. We stand ready to organize additional relief airlifts as circumstances dictate.

In addition to airlifting our own relief supplies, USAID is funding partner organizations delivering relief supplies. Thus far, we have provided \$2 million to the American Red Cross, \$1.5 million to the International Organization for Migration, and \$500,000 to the International Committee of the Red Cross to provide relief commodities to victims in the hardest-hit areas.

The international community faces many challenges in responding to this disaster. The large number of relief flights is straining the logistical capacity of some Pakistani airports. We are working hard alongside our U.S. military and United Nations partners to ensure adequate offloading capacity at these airports, so flights can land, unload their shipments, and depart as rapidly as necessary.

Lack of access to isolated areas is another challenge. Damaged and destroyed roads in this mountainous region make it difficult or impossible to reach many villages by land. This creates problems for determining needs and delivering assistance. The Government of Pakistan is working diligently to open primary and secondary roads. To further facilitate access to isolated areas for international relief teams, USAID is providing \$3.8 million to the World Food Program to facilitate logistical coordination and air operations. And again, the U.S. Department of Defense has provided invaluable support in transporting supplies and relief staff to remote areas, and evacuating injured civilians.

The earthquake generated scores of crush-related injuries, destroyed hospitals, and left thousands without access to health care. USAID is responding to these health needs in partnership with the World Health Organization, which has received \$2 million from USAID to re-establish primary and secondary health care, provide disease surveillance, and offer other essential health services.

Many people in the affected region are now without access to adequate water and sanitation services. If unsanitary conditions are allowed to persist, the spread of communicable disease could lead to hundreds of otherwise preventable deaths. We are working to ensure provision of clean water and adequate sanitation, providing \$2 million to UNICEF to meet critical needs in these relief sectors.

In addition to destroying homes and infrastructure, the earthquake had a devastating impact on local economies and livelihoods. Though it will likely take several years for affected areas to fully recover economically, USAID is planning programs to stimulate communities economically, including "cash for work" programs that offer income to residents in exchange for their work in rebuilding infrastructure.

The threat of frigid weather during the coming winter months has added a sense of urgency to the need to reestablish safe and secure living conditions for affected communities as quickly as possible. As a short-term solution, USAID has shipped winterized tents to the region. Efforts will be made to look at host family arrangements and other medium- to long-term shelter solutions. We have provided \$1.5 million to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to help provide transitional shelter options for displaced communities.

To this point, I have discussed USAID's emergency response to the earthquake. In addition to this short-term relief assistance, USAID's Bureau for Asia and the Near East has already begun looking at the requirements for long-term rehabilitation assistance for the region. As you know, USAID has a Mission in Pakistan with well-established relationships with governmental and non-governmental organizations and agencies in the country. The Mission is looking at needs related to recovery activities in education, health and infrastructure, among other areas.

The Pakistan Government has responded remarkably well given the situation and their military has been clearing roads, ferrying relief commodities, and providing medical care and other support. There has also been a strong international response to this disaster. Over \$650 million has been pledged from various governments so far – which includes a US pledge of \$50 million – and pledges are still being announced. In-kind donations have included search and rescue teams, mobile hospitals, aircraft, relief supplies, and coordination personnel. There are several experienced NGOs with proven track records in the affected parts of the country which are responding with programs to assist the affected communities. The United Nations has mobilized rapidly to assess needs and manage relief efforts. As I mentioned earlier, we have provided substantial funding to the UN to meet a wide range of needs, and are coordinating closely with their teams.

In conclusion, we at USAID are making every effort to support the Government of Pakistan in addressing critical needs as rapidly as necessary. We recognize that this terrible disaster represents an opportunity to help a close and trusted ally in its time of need. We also acknowledge the contributions from many nations around the world, including Pakistan and India, to the United States following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and welcome the opportunity to reciprocate.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to share these observations today with the Subcommittee. I welcome your questions.